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DAN SMOOT

JOHNSON TAKES TIME OUT TO MOURN

What motivates President Lyndon B. Johnson?

Johnson appealed to voters in September, 1964, by saying: "We are not about to send American boys 9000 or 10,000 miles away from home to do what Asian boys ought to be doing to protect themselves."(1)

Many anti-communist conservatives hailed Johnson as "a President who is standing up to the communists" when he ordered limited bombing in North Vietnam on February 7, 1965, thus beginning the escalation which sent thousands of American boys to die in an Asian land war. The conservatives overlooked the fact that Johnson had rendered the bombing ineffective by announcing that he would not bomb major cities, harbors, and vital industries.

After two months of bombing which (in material and personnel expended on worthless targets) cost us more than it cost the communists, Johnson made a speech at Johns Hopkins University (April 7, 1965), saying he did not want to hurt communists in Vietnam, and that he had no desire to *win* the war in which Americans were dying. He promised that the U.S. would contribute $1 billion to a Southeast Asian development program in which communists could participate — if they would just stop fighting.

The communists in North Vietnam ignored the Johns Hopkins speech, but it did seem to please American liberals who had been upset because they thought Johnson's bombing was *intended* to hurt communists.

Johnson's war policy (if it can be called that) evolved into gradual escalation: He would gradually increase pressure until communists decided to stop fighting and take his offer of a billion-dollar bribe.

The pressures on North Vietnam were increased so gradually (and were so easily anticipated by the communists if not openly announced to them) that they had ample opportunity to prepare. They dispersed their industries and airfields and obtained abundant defensive equipment from the Soviets.

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Johnson kept some North Vietnam areas off limits to our bombers until *after* the communists had installed antiaircraft guns and missiles, then ordered our planes to bomb.

Beginning May 13, 1965, the United States halted bombing in North Vietnam for 5 days. Beginning December 24, 1965, the U. S. halted bombing 37 days. Both halts were intended to get Ho Chi Minh to negotiate.[2] He used the bombing pauses to resupply and reinforce his troops in South Vietnam and to launch new attacks.

Johnson permitted enough bombing in North Vietnam to feed communist propaganda that America was indiscriminately murdering millions of women and children — but not enough to inflict damage that would save American lives and win the war. Month by month, the communists grew stronger, while the violence, subversion, and shrill denunciation of the war by communists and liberals in the United States divided and weakened our nation.

The war (which we could have won in a week by full use of our bombing facilities and by denying the communists privileged sanctuaries where our forces could not strike them) bogged down in bloody stalemate by the fall of 1967.

On September 29, 1967, speaking at San Antonio, the President made another offer to negotiate a peace. He said:

"The United States is willing to stop all aerial and naval bombardment of North Vietnam when this will lead promptly to productive discussions. We, of course, assume that while discussions proceed, North Vietnam would not take advantage of the bombing cessation or limitation."[3]

Johnson said this San Antonio offer "went as far as honorable men could go" in conciliation toward an enemy.[4]

The communists ignored this, as they had ignored some 30 previous offers.

Early in 1968, Johnson ordered U. S. planes to stay away from the major population centers of North Vietnam — the Hanoi-Haiphong area. Although not announced as a bombing pause, this restriction was, ostensibly, another effort to induce the communists to negotiate.[2]

The communists utilized the respite to complete their preparations for their gigantic Tet offensive. When the dust settled from that offensive, the war was no longer in stalemate. The communists had the initiative and were winning; we were on the defensive and were losing. They controlled more of the countryside in South Vietnam than we did; and they threatened all major cities, which had previously been considered secure. Their military manpower was growing by leaps and bounds, while ours was reaching the point of dangerous depletion.[5]

Trying to defend himself against such pro-Hanoi spokesmen as Martin Luther King, Robert F. Kennedy, William Fulbright, Eugene McCarthy, *et al*, the President became more "hawkish" in his public statements — though he still refused to lift the restrictions that were costing American lives and handicapping our armed forces.

To an AFL-CIO meeting on February 2, 1968, Johnson said "we would be endangering the lives of our men" in Vietnam to halt or suspend bombing operations "until the enemy is willing to go to the peace table and is willing to say if you stop bombing he will probably come and talk, and that we can have productive discussions, and that he will not take advantage of our restraint to put extra pressures on during that period."[6]

In a news conference on February 16, 1968, Johnson said:

"While we were prepared to go into a Tet truce, they were moving thousands of men from the North into the South for the subsequent attacks on that sacred holiday. I think that ought to be an answer that any elementary school boy or girl could understand. . . .

"I don't think Hanoi is any more ready to negotiate today than it was a year ago, two years ago, or three years ago. I don't think it has been at any time during any of that period."[4]

On March 16, 1968, in a speech to the National

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Alliance of Businessmen in Washington, D. C., President Johnson said:

"The Communists have made it clear that up to now, thus far, they are unwilling to negotiate or to work out a settlement except on the battlefield. If that is what they choose, then we shall win a settlement on the battlefield. . . .

"But make no mistake . . . we are going to win."[7]

In the closing days of March, 1968, Americans captured many enemy documents in Vietnam. Most of them were taken from Viet Cong prisoners who had attended military briefings by Hanoi military officials. The documents made it clear that if Hanoi ever agreed to talks with the U.S., the talks would merely be a stratagem to gain time and advantage.[8]

As late as Sunday afternoon, March 31, 1968, a presidential consultant on the Vietnam war (General Maxwell D. Taylor, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) defended the President's bombing policy. On *Meet the Press* that afternoon, General Taylor said he opposed a bombing halt in North Vietnam because that would "convey the position of weakness here at home."[9]

That night, Johnson — ignoring the lessons of history and his own previous statements that a bombing halt would endanger the lives of our men — unilaterally halted bombing and begged the communists to join him in a "series of mutual moves toward peace."

Coupled with this was the announcement that he would not stand for re-election. With tears in his eyes, Johnson struck a heroic pose, pretending that he was sacrificing himself to lift the presidency above the level of politics in this crucial year.

Actually, he had sensed that he had little chance of winning renomination or reelection. He was running in fright from the gargantuan mess he had made of things, but tried to explain his panicky reversal of field and retreat in terms which he hoped history would record as evidence of a great man's selfless devotion to peace.

On April 3, 1968, the North Vietnamese government announced willingness to meet with U. S. representatives — not to discuss peace negotiations, but to discuss U. S. compliance with their demands for "unconditional cessation of the U. S. bombing raids and all other acts of war against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam so that talks may start."[10]

Johnson immediately planned a trip to Hawaii for a strategy conference with other high officials.

But on April 4, Martin Luther King, Jr., was murdered in Memphis.

Johnson postponed his efforts to stop the carnage of war. Apparently, Americans dying in Vietnam were as nothing in comparison with the death of King.

Martin Luther King, Jr. — whom J. Edgar Hoover has called the "most notorious liar in the country" — was closely associated with communists and sex deviates. His program for America was the unadulterated communist program. He effectively used the communist extortion method of obtaining his goals. Pretending to be nonviolent and reasonable, he made demands, threatening that if they were not met his moderating influence would be lost and militants would take over and cause violence. At the same time, he closely cooperated with the most violent Negro leaders, whom he often criticized in public. King successfully instigated more violence than all of the Negro leaders who admit to being violent militants.

On April 4, 1967 (exactly one year before his death) Martin Luther King, Jr., made a speech charging this nation with "cruel manipulation of the poor" and calling it "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today." He praised communist Ho Chi Minh as a man who would have brought peace and unity to Vietnam, if the United States had not conspired to prevent it; and he repeated as truth vicious communist lies about the conduct of American military forces in Vietnam. Note this selection from King's speech (published in full in the communist *The Worker*, April 16, 1967):

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"[The people of Vietnam] move sadly and apathetically as we herd them off the land of their fathers into concentration camps where minimal social needs are rarely met. . . . So far, we may have killed a million of them — mostly children. They see the children degraded by our soldiers as they beg for food. . . . What do they think as we test out our latest weapons on them, just as the Germans tested out new medicine and new tortures in the concentration camps of Europe?"

When King died, Johnson called him a great apostle of nonviolence who loved his country deeply. The trip to Hawaii for peace talks was cancelled, and a period of national mourning was ordered.

The Stars and Stripes — battle flag of the fighting men whom King had slandered as degraders of children; symbol of the nation which King had maligned as "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world" — was lowered in King's honor.

Johnson indicated he would ask Congress (which King recently characterized as "wild with racism") to enact the pending civil rights law and other measures which King had been demanding.

None of this was intended to prevent Negro rioting, any more than the laughing, shouting Negro hoodlums who looted and burned in Chicago, Washington, and dozens of other cities were mourning the death of King.

Murder is a crime which should be punished, no matter who the victim is; but why should the President and his kind hold the entire white population guilty of the murder of Martin Luther King?

Obviously, Johnson is using the death of King, as he used the assassination of President Kennedy, to stampede Congress into enacting legislation which he hopes history will record among his accomplishments as a great, humanitarian President.

What motivates Lyndon Johnson? I can see nothing except a ruthless desire to promote immediate political goals, a yearning for a hallowed niche in history, and cowardice when confronted with the collapse of his self-serving schemes.

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FOOTNOTES

(1) "Personality Parade," by Walter Scott, *Parade*, Nov. 20, 1966, p. 2
(2) UPI dispatch from Saigon, April 1, 1968
(3) *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, Oct. 6, 1967, p. 2030
(4) *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, Feb. 23, 1968, p. 373
(5) "Hard Facts About Vietnam War," *U.S. News & World Report*, Mar. 25, 1968, p. 36
(6) AP dispatch from New York, Mar. 24, 1968
(7) *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, Mar. 22, 1968, p. 630
(8) UPI dispatch from Washington, Apr. 3, 1968
(9) UPI dispatch from Washington, Apr. 1, 1968
(10) Article by James Reston, *The Dallas Morning News*, Apr. 4, 1968, p. A11

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